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29 October 1981

Somalia: Siad's Position Deteriorates*

Somali President Siad's position has weakened seriously over the past year. [REDACTED] while he may still be able to muddle through, the chances of his surviving are diminishing.

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Siad faces an unprecedented complex of economic, political and security problems [REDACTED] The Somali President appears to hope that he can pull through with largely cosmetic measures similar to those he has used successfully in the past, and may not realize that his current difficulties are too serious to be dealt with in this way.

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While a coup in Mogadishu does not appear imminent, we believe that Siad probably will be forcibly replaced within the next 3-6 months if he does not take strong action to reverse the deteriorating situation. The most effective actions for him to take would be to:

- Begin the rapid decentralization and liberalization of the Somali economy which under its present socialist structure is corrupt and inefficient.
- Demonstrate clearly that he is willing to share real power with other than members of his own Marehan clan.
- Demonstrate that he can deal with Ethiopian and insurgent military challenges.
- Demonstrate through a general and meaningful anti-corruption campaign that he is a reliable international aid recipient. Many large aid donors are reluctant to give funds which they know will probably be diverted from development projects into private bank accounts. Moreover, Siad must deal with widespread resentment of the pervasive corruption in the government which is directed especially at Marehan officeholders.

Siad's reluctance to take any of these measures stems from his reliance upon the Marehan and the corrupt economic and government structure to maintain his own power. Since his defeat of a coup attempt in 1978 staged by dissident Majertain tribesmen, Siad has increasingly restricted his power base to the

*This is an informal assessment prepared for the Secretary of State. It was coordinated at the working level by representatives of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at State under the direction of the National Intelligence Officer for Africa.

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Marehan and to select members of other Somali clans and tribes. It would be a gamble for Siad to move quickly to broaden his base of support because he cannot be sure that he can pick up sufficient support elsewhere in Somali society to replace those he would alienate.

US military aid to Somalia might postpone the day of reckoning for Siad by several months, but would have little long-term effect in the absence of domestic reform. Many Somali military leaders have been disappointed with the limited nature of this aid and the perceived slowness of its delivery. Some leaders may believe that American distrust of Siad is partially responsible for this problem, and have publicly compared the swiftness of the American response to Sudanese military aid requests to the slower pace of their own aid shipments. Measures such as the proposed approval of the delivery of M-47 tanks from Italy to Somalia or of small numbers of hand-carried anti-aircraft missiles will probably be seen as largely symbolic gestures which do not measurably increase Somalia's military capabilities vis-a-vis Ethiopia.

Criticism of Siad within the government and military has risen [REDACTED]

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At the outset, a successor government would be inclined to continue Siad's pro-Western policies, if only because it would have no other choice. Its exact political coloration, however, would only become apparent with time. Most factions within the army probably still view the US as the only country that can counter Soviet support of Ethiopia. General Omar Haji and some of those in his circle are largely pragmatists with little real ideological commitment. For example, in the past they have espoused leftist and pro-Soviet sentiments and more recently have been regarded as strongly pro-American. Somalia's dispute with Ethiopia over the Ogaden, which no Mogadishu government can afford to ignore, will stand in the way of any detente with Addis Ababa's Soviet patrons.

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